

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I thank the Chair, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, no Senator from the State of Illinois could rise on February 12 without noting the birth date of Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln never served in the Senate, although he did serve in the U.S. House of Representatives. One of his most famous political experiences was in 1858 when he ran against Stephen Douglas for the Senate seat which I am honored to occupy. Lincoln lost that election. Of course, following the course of the lengthy debates with Douglas, which became part of the legend of American politics and an important part of our history, by 1860 Lincoln was elected President. And we all know his leadership was so critical in one of our Nation's greatest hours.

We in Illinois dote on Abraham Lincoln. We have his name on license plates. In my hometown, we are consumed with the Lincoln legend and with all that he has given to the State and to the Nation. I hope that those who are witnessing the events in this Chamber today will reflect for a moment on this great man and the great legacy he left to the United States. Lincoln was known very well for his leadership at the time the Nation was in great peril with the Civil War. He did so many things with vision, and I think it is a perfect lead in to my reason for standing before the Senate today. I hope those of us who are in successor generations to Abraham Lincoln can rise to the challenges and can show the same type of vision and leadership on the challenges now facing Americans across the country.

QUALITY CHILD CARE IN AMERICA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I just left a meeting, partisan meeting, Democrats, Senators and Congressmen, with the President and Vice President where we discussed our agenda for this year. At the end of the meeting, President Clinton said that he hoped we could reach across the aisle to the Republican side and find common ground, concede honest differences of opinion but move forward on an agenda which is critically important to all of America's population and families.

I know it is ambitious to think that in a year with an abbreviated schedule we will achieve even a majority of the ideas that were propounded at this meeting or that the Democrats stand for—for that matter, that the Repub-

licans stand for—but we would be remiss if we didn't try. I think we were all sent here to use our best efforts to find common ground and to resolve those difficulties that ordinary Americans face.

One of them I have taken a special interest in and over the last month or so have really focused on in the State of Illinois is the issue of child care. I have visited 16 or 18 child care centers in my State from far south in Cairo, as we pronounce it, to Chicago and across the length and breadth of a very diverse State, my home State of Illinois.

What I find in child care for working families in Illinois is extraordinary diversity. Just about every community in which you stop has a little different approach. It seems that some are blessed with the support of larger institutions. Maybe the most modern, up-to-date and impressive facility was at a U.S. Air Force base, Scott Air Force Base near Belleville, IL. But, of course, the Federal Government has made a rather substantial investment so that the children of the men and women who are working on that base have the very best in child care. I then went as well to the Belleville Community College and saw where the community college made the same type of commitment. It makes a difference. You can just feel it in terms of what is being offered.

That is not to diminish the efforts being made in a lot of different settings. When I would go down to Marion, IL, into the back of a church and find a very small and crowded room with the happiest kids I have ever run into, being supervised by a lady who is probably close to 60 years of age but who truly is devoted to these children, it tells you that what is part of the success of child care in America has to do more with the people involved in it than any Government program or any structure or building or any bricks or mortar.

But having said that, I came away from this tour sensitized to the fact that this is a real issue. So many people in America look at the Senate and the House of Representatives and wonder what newspapers we are reading, what people we are talking to, as we are consumed with issues that seem totally irrelevant.

Now, some of those issues are truly important, but for the average working family their concerns are much more down to earth. I have yet to meet a working mother or a working family with small children where I don't find a genuine concern about day care. My wife and I raised three kids, and we were fortunate; my wife was able to stay home until the kids were all off to kindergarten at least. And I think that was the very best that we could give to them. I look back on it as something that really made a positive impression, a positive difference in their life, and yet we know today that so many parents cannot make that choice, that both parents have to work or if it is a

single parent that there is just no alternative but to turn the children over to a care giver during the day. And we also know that care giving in day care is occurring at a critical moment in that child's development. Seventy-five percent of the human brain is developed in the first 18 months on Earth. Most of the day care centers I visited would not accept a child until they had reached the age of 2 or until they were out of diapers. And so for the first 2 years of critical brain development in these children it was a gamble. Was there someone nearby that could be counted on, a neighbor or relative, perhaps some other setting where the child would get honest, good, safe care?

What the President has proposed in his State of the Union Address and I hope that Democrats and Republicans can debate is what we can do to help working families provide for quality child care. I honestly believe that the investment in early childhood development is the best investment this Nation can make. You often wonder how a child born in ordinary or even poor circumstances has much of a chance. They usually have a chance if they have loving parents with the skills and the time and the resources to make their living meaningful. I came from a family of modest means but, thank goodness, had a mother and father who cared, and I think that is why I am standing here today.

But for a lot of kids that option is strained because a lot of parents do not have resources, and as a consequence they look around in the system and find precious few alternatives. First, most child care is expensive. It is expensive for families that are trying to get by and trying to pay the bills.

What the President has suggested is that we, through money raised in the tobacco bill, send those revenues back to States to make available to working families. So that those families that are out struggling, trying to get by will have a helping hand from the Government to pay for child care. I think that is money well spent, and there is no two ways about it.

Secondly, we have to ask who will work in these child care centers. It is a fact of life that most of the people working there receive precious more than the minimum wage, and they look for alternatives. The turnover rate nationally is 40 percent and in some communities even higher each year as child care workers move on to another job.

In Illinois, we demand of these workers 2 years of college education and then give them a minimum wage. High school dropouts are paid a minimum wage. These students who stayed in school and worked hard to pass the courses are basically being asked to work for the same. Then, of course, we know that businesses that invest in child care really do bond with their employees. Employees value this as one of the most important benefits of work.

So the President has said not only money to help families pay for child